

March 1, 2011

The Honorable Gail Haines
Chair, House Health Policy Committee
Anderson House Office Building
124 North Capitol Avenue
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Chair Haines and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here and testify on behalf of the American Association of Diabetes Educators. My name is Dr. Robert Kocembo and I am happy to lend the enthusiastic support of diabetes educators to the effort to pass and enact HB 5204; legislation to create a true diabetes action plan for the state of Michigan.

Members of the committee, I am a relatively simple and straightforward doctor who focused his time on helping patients fight the good fight against diabetes over the past 29 years. I hope my simple and straightforward approach is welcomed by the committee.

I think it is fair to say we have a massive problem with diabetes in the state of Michigan and it is growing worse by the day. To address this problem, we need to develop the common voice, common measures and hopefully consistent outcomes envisioned by this legislation and championed by Chair Haines and many members of this committee. It is surprising that we have not collectively reached this point prior to now given the reach and scope of the disease but it is good to know we are ready to move forward today.

We have a situation today where it appears that important aspects of state government with a vested interest in containing the diabetes epidemic rarely connect or speak with each other. How can we possibly hope to impact this disease with such an approach to contain it? Yes, we have an eleven billion dollar problem lacking in serious solutions by those who pay the bills.

If projections are to be believed and history provides valuable lessons, we cannot continue fighting diabetes with current approaches. This said we also need to recognize that existing state budget pressures provide a fiscal climate that dictates common sense no cost solutions being our only way forward. This is just the fine line that HB 5204 hopes and helps to achieve.

The Diabetes Action Plan legislation and proposed amendment before you direct state government interests with a role in containing diabetes to jointly assess how the fight is going, develop a plan to continue the good fight and draft a budget for the legislature to review. And, per the proposed amendment, the basis for this work is grounded solely within existing data and information available to the departments so the proverbial wheel is not

reinvented. This all sounds to me like a common sense game plan for any of us regardless of political affiliation.

The absence of action on diabetes in Michigan is a scary thought. As an aside, I wish you could experience what I deal with daily which is communicating to someone that they will lose their sight because they lived with unmanaged diabetes for so long. This experience would help you appreciate how heartbreaking and devastating diabetes is. This experience would contribute life reality to the financial reality of diabetes facing the state.

Inaction today takes the cost of diabetes to sixteen billion dollars from eleven billion dollars in just over ten years. Inaction today means 216,300 new African Americans, 50,600 new Hispanic Americans and 7,600 new Native Americans develop diabetes in Michigan this year alone. Inaction today means more than 131,800 taxpayers lose some of their sight this year to diabetes in Michigan.

Allow me to close by commending this committee for its fine work in not accepting the status quo and inaction when it comes to fighting diabetes. The status quo is no longer acceptable and we need to get smart when it comes to combating the diabetes epidemic. I can think of nothing smarter than passing HB 5204 out of committee with the amendment proposed by the American Diabetes Association and others as a means to take an important step forward in containing diabetes in Michigan. The seriousness of diabetes, and its impact on our state, demands nothing less.

Sincerely,

Robert Kocembo, OD, CDE
Belleville, MI